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The President's Daily Brief

50X1

25 February 1969

19

~~*Top Secret*~~

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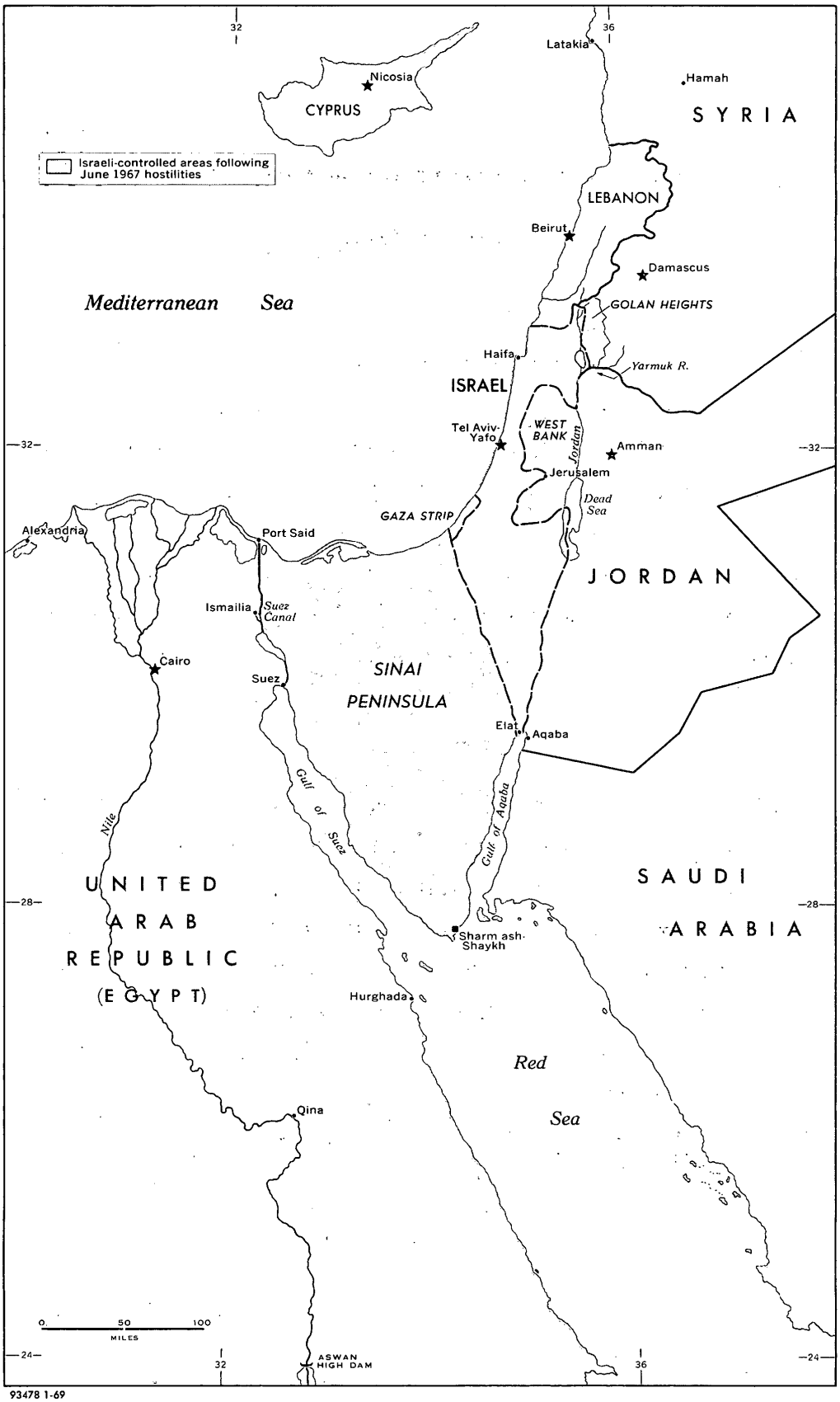

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

Middle East

The Arab states are bracing themselves for further Israeli retaliatory attacks. There is still little solid information on yesterday's air raids, in which the Israelis attacked what they claim to be two terrorist bases in Syria on the road between Damascus and Beirut. Tel Aviv may have calculated that attacks on Syrian targets would have the least likelihood of stimulating a strong international reaction. Moreover, by hitting close to the Lebanese border, the Israelis may have hoped to jolt the Beirut government, which already has a bad case of the jitters.

Europe

All sides in the current imbroglio are sticking to their positions. The British have succeeded in keeping the Germans committed to the idea of WEU talks without the French, although Bonn may still want to postpone the next meeting from 26 February to 5 March. Paris, to judge by Ambassador Seydoux's demarche in Bonn, still refuses to have anything to do with WEU until the Germans accept the French interpretations of the WEU treaty. More public and private recriminations can be expected.

Soviet Affairs

Chances for removing the Bundesversammlung from Berlin remain uncertain.

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Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin, in his meeting with Chancellor Kiesinger on 23 February, apparently encouraged the West Germans to believe that the East Germans might go beyond the concessions suggested by Ulbricht in his letter of 21 February. In that letter, Ulbricht said "positive consideration" would be given to the possibility of opening the Berlin Wall for visits this Easter if Bonn would relocate the election scheduled for 5 March.

Mayor Schuetz has indicated that he and Chancellor Kiesinger are agreed that any pass agreement must last for at least a year, and presumably cover all major holiday periods, not just Easter. They also require that an agreement on passes be firm prior to switching the venue of the Bundesversammlung. The East Germans offered to negotiate a pass agreement following the announcement of a change of site.

Schuetz has been authorized by the Chancellor to sound out the East German authorities, but thus far there has been no reported contact between the two sides. Schuetz has told Western Allied officials that he has until 28 February to inform Bonn whether a decision is still to be made not to hold the Bundesversammlung in Berlin. A Bonn official spokesman has also emphasized that speed is essential to the successful conclusion of a deal.

The Mayor said he expects the pros and cons of the proposed deal to be hotly debated in West Berlin political circles. The bulk of West Berliners would probably be willing to sacrifice the presidential election and its emphasis on Bonn-Berlin ties for the chance to see their relatives and friends in East Berlin.

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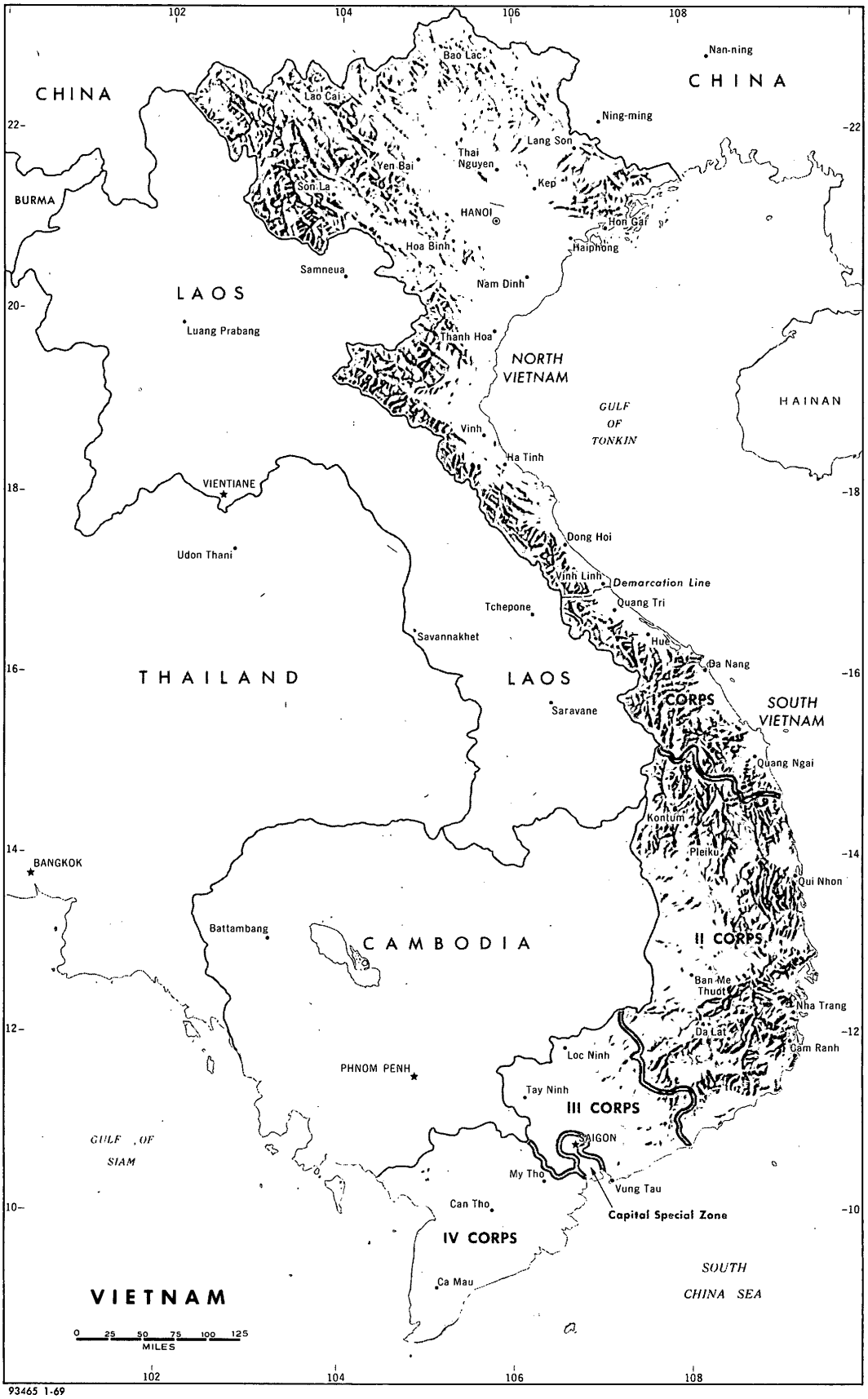

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Soviet military forces in East Germany have been engaged in routine activity over the last three days. There have been no reports of significant East German harassment of West German travel to Berlin.

VIETNAM

Shelling of major target areas continued on the night of 24-25 February, but on a scale below yesterday's and far below the peak reached on the first night of the Communist offensive. Sharp ground fighting is under way near several provincial capitals in southern I Corps. In the III Corps - Saigon area, there is fresh evidence of Communist plans for renewed attacks against the III Corps headquarters complex at Bien Hoa - Long Binh and against Song Be, the capital of Phuoc Long Province.

With few exceptions the enemy's main forces have not been committed. This situation cannot be expected to continue for long, however, as a number of Communist prisoners captured as they probed allied positions on 23 February claim that they were ordered to open up approach corridors for other enemy units which would soon follow. They say that the main enemy blows are yet to come.

This enemy tactic has been reported by low-level prisoners in Southern I Corps; near Saigon and Long Binh in III Corps; and near My Tho in the delta. [redacted] 50X1

[redacted] 50X1

[redacted] The fact that the Communists have sizable main force units available near each of these objectives also gives substance to the prisoner's claims. 50X1

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Enemy documents captured just prior to the current offensive suggest that local force and guerrilla units intend to maintain a relatively high level of activity over an extended period, rather than to engage in an all-out attack. They emphasize that the action planned by these units is primarily of a harassing or terrorist nature designed to disrupt the pacification program, interdict lines of communication, and support political agitation leading to popular demonstrations.

* * *

Most of Saigon's newspapers, in their initial reaction to the Communists' offensive, emphasized the enemy's indiscriminate shelling of civilian population centers. Various editorials suggested responses ranging from a cautious approach to breaking off the peace talks. Some papers felt the Communists shelled Saigon out of inability to match the 1968 Tet offensive.

Official reaction was characterized by President Thieu's remark that these were the actions of an "enemy in a confused and weakened position." Ky, in usual form, told the press that "if they continue to shell our cities, we will bomb theirs."

During the first rocket attack on Saigon in the early hours of 23 February, the government acted quickly to head off what it claimed might develop into a coordinated Viet Cong - militant Buddhist conspiracy. The National Police raided and closed down the An Quang Buddhist Youth Center and arrested some 50 students, most of whom are said to have had Viet Cong leaflets in their possession. Also seized was Thiên Minh, the

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militant Buddhist priest recently given an "official" warning for delivering an antigovernment sermon.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

COMMUNIST CHINA

[redacted] 50X1

KOREA

According to first reports, a North Korean ship of the type used to infiltrate guerrilla teams or agents exchanged fire with a South Korean patrol vessel off South Korea's west coast yesterday. The North Korean ship was first observed some miles off the port of Inchon, west of Seoul, and withdrew to North Korean waters after apparently being hit.

[redacted] 3.3(b)(1)

PERU

Most Latin American governments recognize that the US-Peruvian impasse could have unsettling repercussions in the hemisphere. Almost all governments are now reluctant openly to take sides in the dispute, however, and clearly hope that

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somehow the problem will be settled without a US-Peruvian showdown--and without their having to take sides.

If it comes to a showdown, many Latin American governments will be under pressure of public opinion to side with Peru. This is partly because of their habitual tendency to sympathize with a fellow Latin American "David" in his struggles with the US "Goliath." Also, the Latin American press has seldom presented a balanced picture of the US-Peruvian dispute, which is almost tailor-made for the simplistic explanations Latin Americans are ready to accept when it comes to "imperialist" pressures by the US against Latin America.

Argentina is currently playing a special role. [redacted] 50X1

The Argentines have accompanied their quiet approach to Peru with a noisy public expression of "solidarity" and the "widest collaboration" with Peru. This, they say, is to make it easier for Peru to accept Argentine mediation if it should come to this.

PANAMA

Colonel Martinez, who was arrested and deported to the US yesterday, had given both the junta and the civilian oligarchs ample reason to want his removal. The highhandedness he showed as military chief of staff doubtless alienated his fellow officers, and the oligarchy probably saw his hand in

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recent pronouncements by the junta which abolished political parties and promised important land reform measures.

National Guard Commander Torrijos has clearly emerged as the country's strong man. Torrijos has always been more willing than Martinez to cater to the interests of the oligarchs.

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